

THE DUALITY OF THE FASD DIAGNOSIS IN A CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONTEXT

Jennifer Meixner & Marleny Bonnycastle, Ph.D.

So, you know...?

... FASD diagnosis, on the one hand, increases access to resources. On the other hand, it contributes to label and stigmatizing people, which perpetuates harmful, misleading, and stereotyped narratives. Understanding the duality of the FASD diagnosis is an essential step to promote dignity of people impacted by FASD and improve services.

1. What contributes to stigma against FASD in the criminal justice system?
2. How would having a diagnosis create stigma or promote dignity in FASD?

"The majority of people... in the criminal justice system that we're working with on an ongoing basis don't have the knowledge of FASD."

Ways that FASD diagnosis might contribute to stigma in the justice system...

"[FASD is] often referenced as like a precipitating factor in the situation of whatever incident occurred in their community..."

Criminalization

Lack of knowledge

Lack of diagnosis

Label & stigma

Lack of understanding

"...there was a young boy aged 15 years old who had all the characteristics of FASD... I've been here going on 12 years. He graduated into adult facility, and to me, that is the most saddest thing."

"...When they first hear this individual has that FASD... they could be labeled as stupid or a lost cause."

"The implementation of the FASD court... people automatically assume "oh, okay, they're going to get lighter sentences."

*Let's talk more about... dignity

"I understand the label 'FASD' brings more funding, brings different programs. But I think the way that we get rid of the stigma is we stop saying that..."

Challenge existing terminology

"We're tailoring to individual strengths and individual needs... So I see the diagnosis is a positive thing in terms of ongoing supports, and setting individuals up with appropriate resources so that they have the best chance for success."

Individualized support

Beyond diagnosis

"I think the diagnosis is helpful if you have a support team around you. If there is nobody there, then it doesn't really make much of a difference, right?"

"...every kid who I've worked with, who has had suspected as FASD or diagnosed, has been some of the sweetest little kiddos and very affectionate... What I do is try to focus on strengths and what they're good at and what parents are doing well, instead of kind of tearing them down because it is it is challenging."

Embracing gifts & strengths

"[Dignity promotion is] having the individual and family understanding the diagnosis. And the workers who are working or attached to the family and in the communities understand the needs."

Community mobilization